The History and Performance Aesthetics of Early Modern *Chaban Kyōgen*

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During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the shogunal capital of Edo became, in the words of one scholar, a veritable "city of theatres".[1] One testimony to the dynamism of performance culture during this time is that while the licensed theatre district continued to remain circumscribed within the ideo-spatial territory of *akusho* 悪所 ("place of vice"), a preponderant variety of performance entertainments, some emulative of kabuki and open to participation by amateur enthusiasts, began to proliferate throughout the city. Among the estimated hundreds of different performance entertainments that emerged during this time, perhaps none was more indicative of the vitality of amateur performance than *chaban kyōgen* 茶番狂言 (popularly known as *chaban* 茶番, for short).[2] In its earliest forms—initially as a green room pastime of professional kabuki actors during the Hō'ei period (1704-1711), and then as a salon entertainment of theatre aficionados, aspiring amateurs and various literary types in subsequent decades—*chaban* was more private than public in its staging. In this respect, *chaban* may be likened to *zashiki kyōgen* (座敷狂言 sitting room performances) and other modes of emulative performance in which kabuki enthusiasts re-enacted famous lines, or *meizerifu* 名台詞, from *ōmuseki* 鸚鵡石 (booklets of famous lines, literally "parrot stones") at home or in a salon setting. By the beginning of the Bunka period (1804-1818), however, new forms of outdoor, or *okugai* 屋外, *chaban* were being developed for general audiences, and staged at public sites like temple grounds, river banks and flower-viewing spots. Following popular tastes of the time, vendetta skits, many based loosely on famous kabuki plays, enjoyed the most acclaim, and enabled amateur performers to channel their stage heroes in lively acting sequences and choreographed sword-play.

This study aims to provide a detailed account of this dynamic performance art and its development between the early eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. One of the principal difficulties in taking up the subject of *chaban*, as may already be apparent, is that of defining its categorical purview. The various renderings of *chaban* in English language scholarship as "farce", "theatrical farce", "skit",[3] "kabuki-style skit", "slapstick",[4] "amateur theatrical",[5] etc., limn at the inherent mutability of *chaban* over time. Closer examination reveals just how profound the changes in the conventions and aesthetics of *chaban* performance were. Indeed, the term *chaban* referred to something very different at the end of the Bunka (1804-1818) than it did thirty years earlier. Accordingly, this study will focus both on the history of *chaban* and on its changing aesthetics of performance.

Defining *Chaban*

Writing in Tenmei 8 (1788), on the eve of the Kansei Reforms, Ōta Nanpo 大田南畝 (1749-1823) observed that *chaban* performances were becoming all the rage in Edo's literary salons. In describing this still evolving performance art, Nanpo rightly avoids narrow and historically static definitions. Indeed, one of the chief merits of his piece lies in the critical connection it makes between the early form of *chaban*, as it existed in the kabuki theater, and the later forms that were developed by amateur performers:

[1] Eiko Ikegami, *Bonds of Civility:Aesthetic Networks and Political Origins of Japanese Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 316.

[2] William E. Deal, *Handbook to Life in Medieval and Early Modern Japan* (Oxford: Oxford Uni-versity Press, 2006), p. 281.

[3] C. Andrew Gerstle, "Flowers of Edo: Kabuki and Its Patrons", in *18th Century Japan: Culture and Society* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin), p. 42.

[4] Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Kamikaze, Cherry Blo-ssoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aes-thetics in Japanese History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), p.45.

[5] Andrew Markus, *Willow in Autumn: Ryūtei Tane-hiko, 1783-1842* (Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 38.

> *Chaban* originates from the theaters of Edo. Initially, *chaban* was the name given to a type of performance in which actors, taking turns as *chaban* (茶番 tea attendants) on the third floor of the *gakuya* (楽屋 green room), would present *kibutsu* (器物 ceramic wares and other token gifts) through a combination of preplanned and improvisational devices. Over time, *chaban* has developed from that earlier form to the diversion it is today. *Chaban* now refers to a presentation of *keibutsu* (景物 "seasonal delicacy or gift") based on improvisation, incorporating the movements and gestures of solo performances. Nowadays, it is flourishing throughout the city.[6]

With his usual perspicacity, Nanpo identifies the two most salient aspects of *chaban* performance, both of which remained intact during *chaban*'s development from a private to a popular performance art. The first of these was the tension between preplanning and improvisation in performance—that is to say, an actor's capacity for interpreting a predetermined theme, or *dai* 題, with wit and dramatic flair. The second, not to undercut the importance of the first, was the subordination of performance to presentation, whereby all of the elements of a *chaban* skit—setting, costume, monologue, etc.—were contrived to stir up a sense of suspense about the identity of the *keibutsu*, a seasonal delicacy or object.[7] Since the *keibutsu* was something that the members of the audience stood to receive, often in the form of tea, light refreshments, token gifts, or, in some cases, exotic curiosities like Ryūkyū potatoes, this sense of suspense was heightened by the very real anticipation of receiving something—and in some cases, the anticipation of receiving something delectable on an empty stomach.[8] While later treatises on *chaban* performance affirm the primacy of *keibutsu* in performance, it is important to note that amidst the proliferation of different forms of *chaban* that emerged during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, some dispensed with *keibutsu* entirely, and focused only on the elements of performance. In the main, however, *keibutsu* remained central to *chaban*, even as the manner of presentation grew more elaborate.

Nanpo himself was probably most familiar with *chaban* as an elaborately contrived game of semi-improvisational performance, which in its more ludic moments could be taken to the level of actor impersonation, replete with costumes, wigs, and make-up. It was in this form that *chaban* became a pastime of writers in the stable of Tsutaya Jūzaburō 蔦屋重三郎 (1750-1797) during the An'ei (1772-1781) and early Tenmei (1781-1789) periods — a cultural scene which Nanpo knew well. Besides garnering a cache as a popular *kibyōshi* 黄表紙 writer in his own right, thereby securing his access to the perks and entertainments enjoyed by the members of Tsutaya's circle, Nanpo also played host to writers like Hōseidō Kisanji 朋誠堂喜三二(1735-1815), Shiba Zenkō 芝全交 (1750-1793), Hezutsu Tōsaku 平秩東作 (1726-1789) and Santō Kyōden 山東京伝 (1761-1816) in his *kyōka* poetry circle—not to mention Sakuragawa Tohō 桜川杜芳 (d. 1788), the *kibyōshi* writer who was, by all accounts, the most ardent aficionado of *chaban* in the group.[9] Through these connections, Nanpo was well positioned to learn about the contemporary forms of *chaban*, if not second-hand, then through first-hand observation and direct participation in *chaban* performances. At the same time, Nanpo was also in a position to learn about the earlier and more clandestine form of *chaban* through Ichikawa Danjūrō V 五代市川団十郎 (1741-1806), the professional kabuki actor who participated in his *kyōka*

[6] Ōta Nanpo, *Zokuji kusui* (俗耳鼓吹 *Urging Secular Ears*, 1788), in Hamada Gi'ichirō, ed., *Ōta Nanpo zenshū, vol.10* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1986), p. 18.

[7] During Edo period, the term *keibutsu* had broad application outside of the context of *chaban*. In *haikai* poetics, for example, *keibutsu* referred to the four major seasonal images: flowers, *hototogisu*, moon and snow. In the very different context of commercial advertising, it referred to promotional items produced in conjunction with the marketing of medicines, cosmetics, food, clothing, and other merchandise.

[8] Shikitei Sanba, *Chaban hayagatten* (茶番早合点 *Quick Guide to Understanding Chaban*, 1821-1824), *SNKBT,* 82: 300.

[9] Sanba,368.

circle under the poetic alias Hakuen 白猿.

Figure 1. Illustration of a *chaban* performer on stage, from the second volume of Shikitei Sanba's *Chaban hayagatten*. *SNKBT,* 82: 409.

contemporary forms of *chaban*, if not second-hand, then through first-hand observation and direct participation in *chaban* performances.

Yet for all its merits as one of the earliest authoritative descriptions of *chaban*, and moreover as one which describes both the early and later, popular forms, Nanpo's piece only begins to scratch the surface in terms of uncovering the rich multitude of performance entertainments that were called, at one time or another during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, *chaban*. Indeed, by the time of Nanpo's essay, the term had become something of a catchall for a multitude of performance entertainments, some with no discernable connection whatsoever to the early form of *chaban* described. To complicate matters further, the term had even come to be used interchangeably with *shirōto kyōgen* 素人狂言 (amateur performance), *zashiki kyōgen* 座敷狂言 (kabuki plays performed in private residences) and, in the writings of some, the Kamigata variant *niwaka kyōgen* 俄狂言 (spontaneous performance), three distinct forms of performance with their own conventions and constituencies of enthusiasts—all of which must have further obfuscated the categorical purview of *chaban* and created genuine confusion about what constituted *chaban* and what did not.[10] To reconstruct a history of *chaban*'s development, then, is to grapple with the same dilemma that Nanpo must have faced many years ago, when *chaban* was still an evolving art form—namely, how to delimit the scope of inquiry to a set of performance types which share a number of defining traits, and not just the categorical label *chaban*, in common. To this end, comparative analysis of performance elements and a consideration of the aesthetics of *chaban*, such as they exist, help mitigate the task of taming a wild profusion of similarly named performance entertainments into a workable frame of reference.

A Brief History of Early *Chaban*

The corpus of texts documenting the history of *chaban kyōgen* is relatively small and limited in its scope, no doubt because *chaban* was regarded in its time as an ephemeral art whose traditions did not warrant conscientious custodianship. Moreover, it seems that *chaban* lacked the conventional mechanisms of internal knowledge transmission—that is to say, a closed discourse of "secret teachings", or *hiden* 秘伝—whereby the recognized master of a school would impart practical training in the art, and historical knowledge about the school itself, to a select group of disciples. The relatively lax hierarchical structure that prevailed in *chaban* after it became a popular art suggests that the relationships between "masters" and "students" were not directly predicated on preservation of specialized knowledge about the art.[11] The *iemoto* hierarchy that held forth

[10] To provide an example that highlights the mutability of genre distinctions between *chaban* and *niwaka kyōgen*: In *Zokuji kusui,* Nanpo describes *niwaka* as a performance art exclusive to Osaka (Naniwa), even though Hiraga Gennai 平賀源内 (1729-1779), writing over four decades earlier, describes it as a type of farce performed every autumn by courtesans in the streets of the Yoshiwara, outside of Edo. Shikitei Sanba does not make any regional distinctions between *chaban* and *niwaka*, noting only that the logic of *shukō* and the presentation of *keibutsu* are important in *chaban*, whereas in *niwaka*, absurdity (*okashimi*) is most important.

[11] Here I refer to Nishiyama Matsunosuke's definition of "popular art" as one in which appreciation is predicated on participation in the processes of production or creation. See Nishiyama,

in formal schools of performing arts, serving to structure relationships between masters, protégés and lower-ranking pupils, was not present in any real form in *chaban*, nor was, for that matter, any collective sense among members of belonging to a particular school. Neighborhood proximity, rather than affiliation with a particular tradition or the lineage of a presiding master, appears to have been the main consideration for those who joined the informal troupes, or *ren* 連, that developed in districts like Nihonbashi, Fukagawa, Asakusa, Kanda and Yamanote during the early nineteenth century.[12]

While there is evidence of some performers attaining the distinction of *chaban-shi* 茶番師, or *chaban* masters, Gerstle points out that these figures would have acted in a semi-professional capacity at best.[13] In general, a *chaban-shi* was much less a teacher than someone who simply was recognized for his proficiency in the art. Shikitei Sanba 式亭三馬 (1780-1840) addresses this point in *Chaban hayagatten* when he writes: "One says '*chaban-shi*' when referring to someone accomplished in these techniques (of *chaban* performance)… Yet though one may be called '*chaban-shi*', that does not mean he is someone who advises disciples."[14] This is not to say that there were no exceptions to the rule, however, for a number of a *chaban-shi* did take it upon themselves to promote *chaban* and provide some explication of its performance aesthetics, albeit outside the traditional framework of *hiden* instruction. A prime example is Kintsūya Eiga 琴通舎英賀 (1770-1844), the *chaban* and *kyōka* master who ran a clothing shop in Kanda. His *Chaban no shōhon* (茶番の正本 *Chaban Primer*, c. 1840), while written for a general audience of enthusiasts, provides cogent descriptions of the finer points of *chaban* performance, as well as one of the richest collections of performance texts available at the time. Even if the general lot of *chaban-shi* were not as invested in promotion of the art as Eiga, anecdotal accounts of the time suggest that, at very least, many performed ceremonial roles, such as participating in major convocations of *chaban* masters—playfully known as "gatherings of forty-eight falcons" 四十八鷹会合—as well as serving in capacities as hosts and arrangers of venue.[15]

Augmenting the efforts of performers and *chaban* masters concerned with preserving *chaban*'s building cultural legacy were the contributions of some outside observers. Through the medium of print, these figures worked to document the history of *chaban*, cobble together biographical information about its most important practitioners, record accounts of specific performances, explicate the aesthetics of performance and preserve individual performance texts. Since many of these outside sources are based on the direct testimony of the performers themselves, they offer a reliable basis for constructing a historical outline of *chaban*'s origins and development.

One of the earliest accounts of the history of *chaban*, predating even Nanpo's essay, comes from the Edo section of *Yakusha mikujibako* (役者籤筥, *Lot-Drawing Box of Actors*, 1763), a *yakusha hyōbanki* attributed to Hakuro 白露 and Jishō 自笑.[16] According to this text, an early, protean form of *chaban* emerged out of the licensed kabuki theatres in Edo about fifty years before the composition of this work, or near the end of the Hō'ei period (1704-1711). This form of *chaban* took its name from the tea stewards, or *chaban* 茶番, who served tea and other refreshments to kabuki actors while they took breaks from rehearsals. In essence, this game-like entertainment originated in the practice of one actor serving as "tea steward" to the peers in his troupe, presumably as part of a playful hazing exercise. When some "tea stewards" began to embrace the task with exaggerated deference and dramatic flair, it developed into a unique form of performance entertainment, with its own emerging standards of appreciation and culture of competition.

Around the same time, another, more raucous form of entertainment called *sakaban* 酒番 took shape, one which—as its name makes quite clear—involved the consumption of wine and hearty revelry among actors. One of the hallmarks of *sakaban*

Edo Culture: Daily Life and Diversions in Urban Japan, 1600-1868 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), p. 228.

[12] Sanba, 369.

[13] Gerstle, 42.

[14] Sanba, 356.

[15] Sanba, 381.

[16] *Kabuki hyōbanki shūsei* (henceforth *KHS*) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1989), no.2, vol. 7: 489-566.

as a mode of performance was its formulation of set themes, which were written down on tickets and drawn randomly from a lot box by each participant or group of participants. Herein lay the forerunner of the *dai*, or set topics, that would become a hallmark of later *chaban*. Those who presented the most witty and entertaining variation, or *shukō* 趣向, on a given theme—all in conjunction with the presentation of a particular delicacy for the feast—were singled out for praise by their peers. With the ascension of the influential actor Sawamura Sōjūrō I 初代沢村宗十郎 (1684-1756) to head of the Nakamura-za in the Kyohō period (1716-1736), however, *sakaban* experienced a precipitous decline in popularity. Sōjūrō, who was of the mind that serious actors ought to abstain from drink, encouraged the members of his troupe to participate in an alternative form of *sakaban*, one which exchanged tea for *sake* and more austere confections for the seafood dishes and other luxurious delicacies that had become the norm in *sakaban*.[17] Although different in some respects from the form of *chaban* that preceded it—most notably, in the formulation of set themes—the new form that developed under Sōjūro, as an alternative to *sakaban*, became the dominant form of *chaban*. So much so, in fact, that popular lore attributes the coinage of the term *chaban* to Sōjūrō; despite the fact the term existed well before Sōjūrō's tenure as head of the Nakamura-za.

Subsequent accounts of *chaban*, while corroborating the essential points offered in *Yakusha mikujibako*, also serve to confirm a general timeline of its development. Sanba's *Chaban haya gatten*, by far the most extensive study of the subject, cites the earliest documented references to *chaban* to confirm its initial development during the Hōei period (1704-1711). By Sanba's reckoning, *chaban* experienced a rise in popularity during the Kyōho period (1716-1735), until ultimately reaching a peak during the Hōreki (1751-1764) and Meiwa (1764-1768) periods. It is important to note, however, that this timeline refers to *chaban* only as it developed in the social world of the kabuki theater, not amongst amateurs. There are no reliable bases for dating the emergence of amateur *chaban*, although most sources agree in citing the pseudonymous figure Kakushi 角至, a *chaban* aficionado, as being instrumental in promoting *chaban* as a popular art.[18] And while it is not entirely clear under what circumstances *chaban* went from being a pastime of kabuki actors to an entertainment of amateur performers, some later sources indicate that aspiring amateur performers, including even some high-ranking samurai, may have received instruction in kabuki theatres.[19] Once it took root in the cultural circles in the city, *chaban* began to develop into a profusion of loosely affiliated performance types, some little more than exercises in imitating one's neighbors on visits through one's home district.[20]

Yet even as it was transported from the green rooms of the kabuki theater to amateur salons throughout the city, *chaban* retained a firm connection to kabuki dramaturgy and performance. Among its canon of set themes, or *dai*, those involving mimicry of roles in kabuki adaptations of the *Chūshingura* (忠臣蔵) and *Sōga monogatari* (曽我物語) narratives ranked among the most popular. In its performance techniques as well, many of which were developed for *chaban* by figures like Rijū 里住, there is palpable evidence of kabuki's influence. The *hikinuki miburi* 引抜身振 technique described and illustrated in *Chaban sangai zue* (茶番三階図絵 *An Illustrated Guide to Chaban Performance on the Third Floor*), for example, bears striking similarity to the technique of *hikinuki* in kabuki, whereby an actor removes his outer garment with a dramatic flourish at an important stage in a performance.[21] Moreover, in its later instantiations as an imitative or emulative mode of performance, *chaban* also incorporated parodic mimicry of famous kabuki actors. A well-known example is that of Ryūtei Tanehiko 柳亭種彦 (1783-1842), whose putative physical likeness to the stage star Bandō Mitsugorō III 三世坂東三津五郎 (1775-1832) and uncanny ability to imitate the actor's histrionics won him fame throughout the *chaban* circles of

[17] Sanba, 363.

[18] *KHS*, no. 2, vol. 7: 510.

[19] See for example *Shizu no odamaki* (賤の小田巻 *Bobbin Notes*, 1802), cited in Ikari Akira, *Ryūtei Tanehiko* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōunkan, 1989), pp.54-55.

[20] Sanba, 364.

[21] *Chaban sangai zue*

Edo.[22] For this, he earned the playful nickname Mitsuhiko 三ツ彦—a portmanteau-like combination of the names Mitsugorō and Tanehiko.[23]

The Elements of *Chaban* Performance

Among the three main elements of *chaban*—*engi* (演技 acting), *hane* (ハネ wit), and *keibutsu* (景物 "seasonal delicacies or gifts")—the dispensing of *keibutsu* was considered to carry the greatest importance. This privileging of *keibutsu* is reflected in Sanba's succinct formula—"when it comes to *chaban*, *keibutsu* are the first consideration, matters of style (*shukō* 趣向) are secondary."[24] C*haban* texts can be seen to hew to this formula in their dramaturgical structure, which conventionally opens with an introduction of the *dai*, or topic, followed by an exposition in which certain words, phrases, or images are deployed to whet the audience's curiosity about the *keibutsu*, and lastly, a climatic unveiling of the *keibutsu* itself. At their most elemental, *chaban* pieces could be little more than riddle-like addresses to the audience, with minimal basis for dramatic interpretation. *Heso chaban* (臍茶番 *Chaban Boiled in the Belly Button*, 1846) documents an example of such a skit, whose *dai* is *Tōmegane* (遠目鏡 *Telescope*). According to the performance notes, the performer begins by describing the titular object and its wondrous power to enable the viewer to see distances of one and two-thousand *ri*. Then, midway through the monologue, the performer takes out a *daikon* radish, holding it up to his eye in the manner of a telescope as he delivers the following lines: "Here I see Ryūkyū, Satsuma, and Chōsen (Korea). Then, as I direct my telescope upwards, I can see various countries like Ezo (Hokkaidō), Oroshiya (Russia), and Tenjiku (India)." [25] Despite an instance of wordplay involving the old Japanese name for "Russia" (Oroshiya) and the popular condiment "grated daikon" (*daikon oroshi*), the humor of this piece appears to derive from the obvious visual *mitate* inherent in its main prop—that is, in the absurd replacement of a *daikon* radish for a telescope. According to the performance notes, after this piece was performed, the actor would withdraw from the stage, leaving the *keibutsu* behind. Then the recipient of the *keibutsu* would be determined by drawing lots.[26]

Another example of how all the elements of the performance were subordinated to the presentation of the *keibutsu* can be found in *Asobi no tomodachi* (遊びの友達 *Friends at Play*), a short *chaban* piece attributed to Ryūkotei Hōsen 柳橋亭豊川:

> My topic (*dai*) is "friends at play." There are many forms of play. As luck would have it, today happens to be *hatsune no hi*, festival of the first child. Commencing with the first games of spring, I meet with all of you, my playmates. You come over to my house, and I say, "pull it out of the ground." Now I present to you what we have pulled out of the ground, a thousand-generation pine sapling (*chiyo no komatsu*), as a gift.[27]

According to the performance note and illustration at the end of this piece, the *keibutsu* was a stack of fifty tobacco pipes (*kiseru*), wrapped in pine-green gauze pouches.[28] The pouches had a sewn inseam which created separate pockets for the pipes and clumps of tobacco. Although there are no explicit references to pipes or tobacco in this performer's delivery, the connection between this content and the appearance of the *keibutsu* would have been apparent to those who could decipher the underlying *hane* of this piece—the color association between *chiyo no komatsu*, the ceremonial pine sapling, and the pine green tobacco pouches.

Other *keibutsu* employed cultural references, verbal puns, or visual *mitate* to limn at the identity of the *keibutsu*. In a piece with the *dai Koi* (恋 *Love*), for example, a profusion of kerchiefs dyed in mottled patterns of red, yellow, black, and white—the colors of *koi* carp—are used as props throughout

[22] Andrew Markus, *Willow in Autumn: Ryūtei Tanehiko, 1783-1842* (Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 37-38.

[23] Nakamura Yukihiko, "Chaban", *Nakamura Yukihiko chojutsushū*, vol. 11 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1982), 262.

[24] Sanba, 377.

[25] Cited in Nakamura, 260.

[26] Nakamura, 260.

[27] Cited in Sanba, 362-363.

[28] Sanba, 363.

the exposition, until, through a sudden climatic transition, they are revealed to be the *keibutsu*. Obviously the *hane* here would have been in the pun between *koi* (love) and *koi* (carp), with the alternative reading of *koi* as "carp" suggested through the colors of the kerchiefs.

As the examples of *daikon* radishes, tobacco pipes and dyed handkerchiefs suggest, *keibutsu* could be quite unconventional. For the audience, part of the surprise lies not only in the riddle-like presentation of the *keibutsu*, but the inherent curiosity of the article that one stood to receive. Sanba draws upon a preponderance of anecdotal accounts in *Chaban haya gatten* to provide some scope of the unusual, and at times quite lavish, variety of gifts that could be presented at the climatic end of a *chaban* performance. He notes, for example, a performance after which thirty wicker caskets were distributed to the audience, each of which contained a pearl-studded sake decanter.[29] Potted cactuses were given out after another performance, and as is apparent from errata to the first volume of his work, Sanba

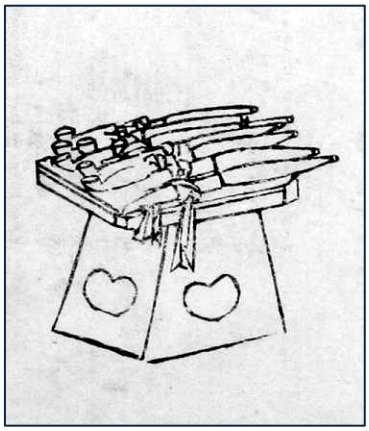

Figure 2. An illustration of the *kiseru*, or tobacco pipes, distributed to audience members at the conclusion of the *chaban* skit *Asobi no tomodachi*. From *SNKBT,* 82: 363.

ction of it.[30] Perhaps strangest of all is the anecdote about how after one performance, a performer presented a *keibutsu* of human anatomical models, cobbled together out of *daikon* radishes, carrots, and other vegetables.[31] While vegetable art appears to have been a rarity, seasonal delicacies and culinary curiosities, like Ryūkyū potatoes, were not. It should come as no surprise given the original provenance of *chaban* in the junketings of the *gakuya* that food and drink were commonly dispensed as *keibutsu*. Concommitant with this practice was a veritable pantry raiding of the popular canon of kabuki and *jōruri* plays for any scenes involving eating or drinking. Predictably, *Chūshingura* was a popular source of material, especially the famous scene in which Kudayū tests Yuranosuke by offering him octopus on the night before the anniversary of Enya's death. In fact, a distinct subgenre of *chaban* known as *kui-chaban* 食茶番, or alternatively, *tabemono chaban* 食物茶番, arose out of the corpus of performance texts that aimed to appeal to the literary tastes of audiences on one hand, through ingenious textual references to eating, and on the other, to the gustatory senses through the presentation of comestible *keibutsu*. At the end of a *chaban* skit whose *dai* was *Chūshingura*, the performer invokes the subgenre of *kui-chaban*—which by this time appears to have signified a conventionalized set of dramaturgical and offertory conventions—as the determinative factor in choosing to offer food as the *keibutsu*:

> "Since this piece is a *kui-chaban*, and it would inappropriate if we did not offer some fare, we present you now with the *keibutsu*, with the hope that it suits your palate."[32]

As these references illustrate, *chaban* became a unique site of cultural consumption, located at intersections of theatrical performance, dining and merchandising of material wares. Returning for a moment to the performance note at the end of *Asobi no tomodachi*, we find detailed information about the source of the tobacco pipes and pouches—namely, that they were provided by the Nezumiya, a shop in Ningyō machi that specialized in the manufacture of stage props.[33] Although more research is needed to

[29] Sanba, 378.
[30] Sanba, 369.
[31] Sanba, 378-379.
[32] Cited in Sanba, 370.
[33] Sanba, 363.

establish documented links between *chaban* performance and the merchandising of goods like stage props and textiles, this note offers some suggestion of the marketing possibilities of *chaban*, of using amateur performance as a front for distributing sample wares to potential customers. The term *keibutsu*, after all, was also used in advertising, referring to promotional items produced in conjunction with the marketing of medicines, cosmetics, food, clothing, and other merchandise.

Notwithstanding the strong emphasis on *keibutsu* in *chaban,* at least until the early nineteenth century, it is important to keep sight of the fact that the presentation of *keibutsu* was but the end result of an extensive process of preparing for, and delivering, a performance. *Chaban* may be called unique in the regard that even as it entailed elaborate preparations in the choice of costumes, wigs, make-up, and occasionally even stage backgrounds and props, it also remained, first and foremost, an improvisational mode of performance. Sanba writes to this point in *Chaban hayagatten* when describing the elements of *chaban* performance: "First, one puts on a wig and applies make-up, assuming the appearance of an actor. Then one performs in whatever way one sees fit. Lastly, one makes a presentation of *keibutsu*."[34] The first stage of the process may not have been as casual as Sanba makes it out to seem. Handbooks like *Chaban sangai zue* (茶番三階図絵 *An Illustrated Guide to Chaban Performance on the Third Floor*) offer detailed technical advice on the selection of costumes, wigs and props, as well as on nearly every conceivable matter in dressing for a *chaban* performance—indeed, this seems to have constituted a veritable art unto itself. Sanba's formulation also suggests that actor impersonation was much more common than the few extant anecdotes describing its practice would have us believe—indeed for Sanba, it seems to constitute an integral aspect of the performance. In order to enhance the mimetic quality of one's actor impersonation, it would seem that study of the subject—either through viewing of performances, actor prints and other theatre-related ephemera, or rote memorization and rehearsal of *meizerifu* promptbooks—would have entailed additional preparations for the performer. Simply looking like the subject of one's impersonation surely would not have been enough to deliver a compellingly irreverent performance.

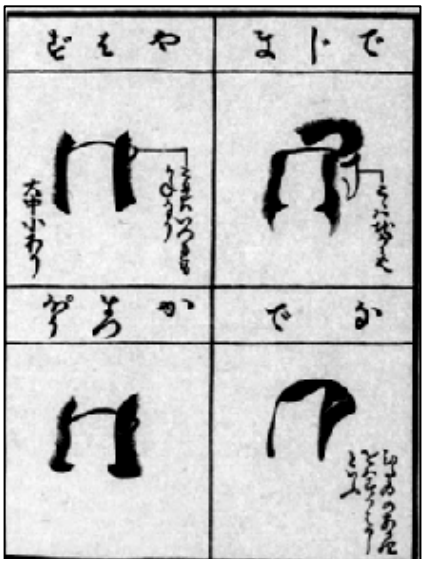

Figure 3. Diagrams of wigs used in *chaban* performances. From *Chaban sangai zue*.

Chaban al Fresco

No study of *chaban*, even one of this limited scope, would be complete without mention of the outdoor variants of *chaban* performance that developed during the Bunka (1804-1818) and Bunsei (1818-1830) periods. On this point, Hamada provides a useful basis for categorization of later *chaban,* determined by sites of performance. Under this schema, there are two main categories: *zashiki chaban* 座敷茶番, encompassing the various forms that developed within a salon setting, and *yagai* 屋外, or outdoor, *chaban*, referring to a subset of performance modes that relied on more extensive use of costumes, props, stage backgrounds, and choreography of swordplay scenes, all in keeping with the outdoor setting.[35] Of these, perhaps the best known, and most representative type of *yagai chaban* was *hanami chaban* 花見茶番, or "flower-viewing *chaban*", which as its name indicates was customarily performed in conjunction with springtime flower viewing.

The differences between *yagai* and *zashiki cha-*

[34] Sanba, 367.

[35] Hamada Keisuke, *Chaban ni tsuite*, in SNKBTK, pp.472-473.

ban extended well beyond matters of venue alone, and we might note, for example, that *keibutsu*, and its attendant aesthetics of presentation, played a diminished role in outdoor *chaban* performances. In some cases, *keibutsu* were even dispensed with entirely. The constitution of the audience was also very different for *zashiki* and *yagai chaban*. Whereas *zashiki chaban*, in its various forms, was performed and appreciated within a closed circle of peers, outdoor variants like *hanami chaban* were often performed for a general audience—all of which undoubtedly had a profound effect on the dynamics of interaction between actor and audience, and indeed, on the most basic matters of performance.

One of the best known sources on *hanami chaban* — and for that matter, *yagai chaban* — is not a theatrical handbook at all, but a work of fiction, Ryūtei Rijō's 滝亭鯉丈(1777-1841) popular *kokkeibon Hanagoyomi Hasshōjin* (花暦八笑人 *Eight Laughers: A Flower Calendar*, 1820-1834). In Book Two, a group of dilettantes, a few of whom are roaring drunk, attempt to stage a *chaban* performance at a popular flower-viewing spot on Mount Asuka, loosely basing their skit on kabuki vendetta plays like *Katakiuchi tsuzure no nishiki* (敵討襤褸錦 Vendetta in Patched Brocade, 1736). As Sajirō, one of the characters, explains, the motive behind their skit is not such much to engage in serious acting, or even to entertain, as much as it is to show off their sword-playing prowess before a group of female audience members. Over the course of the story, their plans to stage the skit go awry. While Sajirō and his friend Demejū rehearse their parts, working out the choreography of the swordfight, Demejū accidentally pokes one of two passing samurai in the nose with his prop sword. The samurai fly into a rage, and threaten to execute both men on the spot. Only when they mistakenly come to believe that Sajirō and Demejū are actually two samurai disguised as beggars, seeking to exact revenge on the murderer of their lord, do they view the shabby pair as engaged in a noble crusade to uphold their family honor and let them go on their way unharmed. A second run-in with the samurai send Sajirō and Demejū into frantic escape, and the planned skit, despite all manner of preparations for stage, costumes and props, never comes to fruition.[36]

Conclusion

Chaban constituted an important cultural activity for actors, writers, poets and amateur enthusiasts from various social backgrounds in early modern Japan. Amidst the great variety of forms that developed between the latter half of the eighteenth and early decades of the nineteenth centuries, those that emphasized actor impersonation and presentation of a *keibutsu* enjoyed the most enduring popularity in salon settings. For writers and poets like those affiliated with the stable of Tsutaya Jūzaburō and the *kyōka* circle of Ōta Nanpo during the An'ei (1772-1781) and early Tenmei (1781-1789) periods, *chaban* served as a pretext for camaraderie and merrymaking, and as such, was tied into the social dynamics of circle affiliation. By the beginning of the Bunka period (1804-1818), new forms of outdoor (*yagai*) were being developed for general audiences, and staged at public sites like temple grounds, river banks and flower-viewing spots. Following popular tastes of the time, vendetta skits, many based loosely on famous kabuki plays, enjoyed the most acclaim, and enabled amateur performers to channel their stage heroes in lively acting sequences and choreographed swordplay. In general, the tenor of these later outdoor variations of *chaban* was less parodic than the earlier salon forms, even though salon *chaban* of the Bunka (1804-1818) and Bunsei (1818-1830) periods appears to have been heavily reliant on actor impersonation.

In closing, it seems appropriate to cite a *chaban* anecdote that highlights the very difficulty of defining this dynamic performance art in all of its variety. During a major assembly of *chaban* masters in the Tenmei period (1781-1789), Hōseidō Kisanji was called upon to perform a *chaban* skit. Much to the disbelief of those in attendance, the *dai* he drew from the lot box was "*chaban*". Many must have thought, "how can one possibly represent *chaban* within the context of a *chaban* skit?" Kisanji, however, responded to the challenge. Changing into the garb of a servant, he loaded a wicker casket onto his back and reappeared before the group. Feigning physical strain under a heavy load, he lumbered into

[36] Koike Tōgorō, ed., *Hanagoyomi hasshōjin* (Tokyo: Iwanami bunkō, 1994).

the room, stumbling onto the floor before propping himself back up. In this ridiculous guise, he addressed the group, "Well now, everyone, I must beg your pardon. I drew the *dai* entitled "chaban", and came here with the *keibutsu* loaded into my wicker casket. But now that I've upset the casket, I wonder if I haven't done damage to them. Let's have a look, shall we?" And with that, Kinsanji opened the lid to his casket to reveal a catty of tea pouches. "Please look here, everyone. Just like my wicker casket, the contents have been turned upside down and '*chaban*' has turned into become '*bancha*' 番茶!"[37]

[37] Cited in Samba, 381.